

# MISSOURI CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

## EQIP Improves Life for Limited-Resources Dairy Farmer

It didn't take Jesus Perez long to figure out that he liked the new animal waste management system on his dairy farm.

"Before, it was hard for the cows. It was hard for me," Perez says as he looks out over the new roof-covered, concrete feeding floor next to the milking barn on his Laclede County farm. "Now, it's very nice."



*Jesus Perez is proud of the animal waste management system that NRCS helped him design and install on his dairy farm.*

Perez has been operating the 75-cow dairy since 1996, and he and his wife Juanita Martinez-Perez have co-owned it along with Juanita's father since 1999. Because they qualified as limited-resource farmers, they were able to receive 90 percent cost-share under the Environmental Quality Improvements Program (EQIP) to install an animal waste system.

EQIP is a program managed by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. It provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers install structural

conservation practices and to implement management systems that promote conservation.

The \$100,000 system that Perez installed includes the feeding floor, roof, holding pit, lagoon and a storage tank and flush system. It also includes a new well, supply lines, tanks and hydrants for a prescribed grazing system on the 160-acre farm.



*Jesus Perez, left, and NRCS District Conservationist Dan Silberberg observe the flush system in action at the feeding shed.*

Before the waste-management system was completed in January, solid waste built up on a dirt lot next to the milking barn. Perez had to scrape it up and haul it to a large pile on the farm. Now all he has to do is open the valve to a tank, which flushes the waste off the feeding floor and into a lagoon. Water from the lagoon is then pumped back into the flush tank for use the next day.

“The system has improved efficiency,” says Dan Silberberg, NRCS district conservationist. “It helps him save time in hauling waste, and it provides a lot cleaner environment.”

Perez says he noticed those benefits right away.

“When the cows go in the barn now, they are clean, and it keeps the milk barn clean,” he says. It’s a lot easier for me. Before, I was working hard.”

Theresa Woods, NRCS agricultural engineer, says it took about a year, working with Perez, to design a system that would work well at his farm and would accomplish what he wanted the system to do. There were a few obstacles that affected the design. For instance, the lagoon needed to be located 440 feet from the feeding floor because rocky soil near the feeding and milking area would not have supported a lagoon. The waste could not be flushed

the entire distance to the lagoon, so a holding pit was built at the end of the feeding floor. From there, the waste flows through an underground pipe from the pit to the lagoon. There is also a sinkhole near the milking barn, so the system was located downhill from it.

“If waste got into that sinkhole, it probably wouldn’t just affect water quality right there,” Woods says. “It could affect water quality at Bennett Springs” (a state trout park in the area).

In addition to reducing labor, protecting water quality and creating a cleaner environment at the farm, the waste management system should reduce fertilizer costs. Perez will follow a nutrient management plan developed by a technical service provider. The plan will help him know the best time to pump the nutrients from the lagoon onto the grass in the



pastures. It will also help him get the nutrients to the pastures that will benefit the most from it.

“They probably won’t know until they pump out the lagoon the first time how much they will save,” Woods says.

Juanita, who manages the finances for the farm, says the family is thankful for EQIP because it has allowed them to vastly improve their dairy operation while also creating cleaner living conditions around the home next to the milking barn that she and Jesus share with their son Marcos.

“We couldn’t have done this on our own,” she says.

*Written by Charlie Rahm  
NRCS, April 2007*

*For more information about EQIP or  
other NRCS programs, contact the  
USDA NRCS office serving your county,  
or access this website:  
[www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/programs).*

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*Laclede County dairy farmer  
Jesus Perez opens the flow valve  
to flush manure from the  
feeding-shed floor into a lagoon.*

